

With school back in session and farmers throughout the state struggling to get back on their feet after Tropical Storm Irene, Rep. Peter Welch today introduced legislation to allow Vermont to use federal funds to buy local produce for schools.

Vermont schools currently receive produce from a regional distribution center in Rhode Island under the Department of Defense (DOD) Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. The program – a joint partnership between the DOD and Department of Agriculture – was created in 1994 and uses the DOD's existing food distribution network.

Welch's Fresh and Local School Foods Act would create a three-state pilot program that would allow participants to opt-out of the DOD program and spend those funds instead on local fruits and vegetables.

"Vermont has a vibrant community of farmers who provide fresh and nutritious food to our state," Welch said. "Many of those same farmers were devastated by Tropical Storm Irene and are struggling to get back on their feet. This bill will give local farmers a much-needed boost, strengthen Vermont's economy and provide children with fresh, local and nutritious food."

The pilot program could help Vermont direct \$90,000 in federal support to local agriculture throughout the state.